WINTER 2023 : VOLUME 4 : ISSUE 1

Ṣirāṭ Link

A path for connecting with the Creator, others, and one's self

REVIVE

Triads of Sacred Time • Rise Above the Clouds • Why Not Heaven?

Letter from MOULANA ABIDI

Salāmun ʿalaykum,

May Allah (swt) bless us, our families, and our communities. My tabrīkāt, taḥiyyāt, best wishes, and congratulations to the Imām of our time, Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj), our great marājiʿ and scholars, and to the Muslim ummah on the beginning of the spiritual season, the blessed months of Rajab, Shaʿbān, and Shahr Ramaḍān.

A plant does not suddenly appear out of nowhere. It begins as a seed and gradually grows in stages. But in order for a plant to be healthy, it must also receive adequate amounts of water, nutrients, and sunshine. In other words, it must be taken care of properly. One can analogize the soul in a similar manner. In Islam, the purpose of a human's existence is to reach perfection, which is defined as closeness *(qurb)* to Allah (swt). Just as the spring season marks the regrowth of the plants, the month of Rajab marks the renewal of a person's soul and quest for union with Allah (swt).

In this sense, Rajab is the month of reseeding our faith and relationship with Allah (swt). We nourish this seed with spiritual water and sun through various recommended ritual practices and by following the example and blueprint of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). This seed eventually grows into a plant during the month of Shaʿbān. In this month, we continue to grow the plant by nourishing

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Ṣirāṭ Link
A 2nd Chance Books Publication

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ
مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner.
(Noble Qurʾān 76:8)

2nd Chance Books is a non-profit organization that was founded in order to assist incarcerated Muslims by providing them with educational materials, tools for rehabilitation, and a support system. By responding to their numerous questions about Islam, they gain a more thorough understanding of the religion. So far, 2nd Chance has distributed over 20,000 books to inmates across the country.

Among 2nd Chance's most recent initiatives is Ṣirāṭ Link, a quarterly magazine. The title Ṣirāṭ Link, inspired by the Arabic term Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm which means the right path, presents this magazine as a means of guidance to a better connection to Allah, as well as offering the opportunity for connections with the broader community, and the improvement of one's self. InshāʾAllāh it can also serve as an opportunity for growing one's faith through education.

This magazine will be under the guidance and oversight of Moulana Nabi Raza Mir Abidi, Resident ʿĀlim of SABA Center, and several other scholars and experts.

NOTICE: 2nd Chance Books' previous address at 3735 Franklin Rd, Roanoke, VA will be deactivated on 3/20/23. Any mail sent to that address after March 20th will not be received. Please direct all mail to our active address:

2nd Chance Books, 4415 Fortran Court, San Jose, CA, 95134

the soul with proper akhlāq and observing our duties towards Allah (swt). These actions of renewal prepare us for the upcoming Shahr Ramaḍān. This holy month is critical in our quest to reach spiritual perfection and for our salvation in the Hereafter, so we wouldn't want to enter it empty handed. We want to enter it spiritually renewed so that we may take our relationship with Allah (swt) to the next level.

Let us therefore take advantage of this beautiful month of Rajab. Let us grow this seed of faith by following the example of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) and serving the oppressed of the world through prayer and good deeds. By following the right role models and serving Allah's creatures all around the earth, we open the opportunity to finally reach communion with Him.

Jazākallāh khayrā and best wishes,

Nabi R. Mir (Abidi)

Resident ʿĀlim of SABA Islamic Center

SIGNIFICANT DAYS OF:

SHAHR RAJAB

1st	Birth Anniversary of Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (ʿa)	*January 23rd, 2023
3rd	Death Anniversary of Imām ʿAlī al-Hādī an-Naqī (ʿa)	*January 25th, 2023
10th	Birth Anniversary of Imām Muḥammad at-Taqī al-Jawād (ʿa)	*February 1st, 2023
13th	Birth Anniversary of Imām ʿAlī (ʿa)	*February 4th, 2023
25th	Death Anniversary of Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (ʿa)	*February 16th, 2023
26th	Aʿmāl of Night of Miʿrāj & Mabʿath	*February 17th, 2023
27th	Eid al-Mabʿath and Miʿrāj	*February 18th, 2023
28th	Imām Ḥusayn (ʿa) begins journey to Karbala	*February 19th, 2023

SHAHR SHAʿBĀN

1st	Birth Anniversary of Sayyidah Zaynab (ʿa)	*February 21st, 2023
3rd	Birth Anniversary of Imām Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī (ʿa)	*February 23rd, 2023
4th	Birth Anniversary of Ḥaḍrat ʿAbbās ibn ʿAlī (ʿa)	*February 24th, 2023
5th	Birth Anniversary of Imām Zayn ul-ʿĀbidīn (ʿa)	*February 25th, 2023
15th	Birth Anniversary of Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj)	*March 7th, 2023

SHAHR RAMAḌĀN

1st	Beginning of Fasting	*March 23rd, 2023
10th	Death Anniversary of Ḥaḍrat Khadījah al-Kubrā (ʿa)	*April 1st, 2023
15th	Birth Anniversary of Imām Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī (ʿa)	*April 6th, 2023
18th	Night of 19th Laylat ul-Qadr	*April 9th, 2023
20th	Night of 21st Laylat ul-Qadr	*April 11th, 2023
21st	Death Anniversary of Imām ʿAlī ibn Abū Ṭālib (ʿa)	*April 12th, 2023
22nd	Night of 23rd Laylat ul-Qadr	*April 13th, 2023

SHAHR SHAWWĀL

1st	Eid ul-Fiṭr	*April 21st, 2023

*Please note the above Gregorian dates are only estimates. The dates are subject to change based on moon sighting, upon which the Islamic calendar is based.

Triads of Sacred Time

By Sheikh Ja'far Muhibullah

إِنَّ
عِدَّةَ اَلشُّهُورِ
عِنْدَ اَللّٰهِ اِثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْراً فِي كِتٰابِ
اَللّٰهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ اَلسَّمٰاوٰاتِ وَاَلْأَرْضَ مِنْهٰا
أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرُمٌ ذٰلِكَ اَلدِّينُ اَلْقَيِّمُ فَلا تَظْلِمُوا
فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَقٰاتِلُوا اَلْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمٰا
يُقٰاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاِعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اَللّٰهَ مَعَ اَلْمُتَّقِينَ

"Indeed the number of months with Allah (swt) is twelve months in Allah's ordinance from the time He created the heavens and the earth. Of these, four are sacred. That is the upright religion. Therefore be not unjust to yourselves during them."

Qurʾān, Sūrah at-Tawbah (9), Verse 36

The Islamic year is based on a twelve-month lunar calendar. While each month has special days associated with it, only four are sacred months in which fighting is forbidden. And with personal conflicts out of the way, a person can focus on spiritual development. In effect, all disputes should be set aside during the last two months of the year, Dhul Qaʿdah and Dhul Ḥijjah, at the beginning of the year, Muḥarram, and midway through the year in Rajab.

Although Rajab stands alone on the chronological timeline, it inaugurates the second triad of revered months. For it is followed by the months of Shaʿbān and Shahr Ramaḍān.

According to a Prophetic narration, "Allah (swt) created an angel in the seventh heaven named '*Ad-Dāʿī*' (the Caller) who shouts every night till morning during the month of Rajab: 'Blessed are those who remember! Blessed are those who obey!'" The angel then quotes Allah (swt) saying:

"I am the companion of the one who sits with me; I am the forgiver of the one who asks for My forgiveness. This month is My month. Therefore, whoever calls on Me this month, I will answer him; whoever asks Me, I will grant him; whoever asks for guidance, I will guide him. I have established this month as a means of communication between Myself and My servants. Therefore, whoever uses it, reaches Me."

1 Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl, V. 2, P. 628

Whenever the Noble Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) saw the new moon of Rajab, he supplicated:

اَللّٰهُمّ بَارِكْ لَنَا فِي رَجَبٍ وَشَعْبَانَ وَ بَلِّغْنَا شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ وأَعِنّا عَلَى الصِّيَامِ وَالْقِيَامِ وَ حِفْظِ اللِّسَانِ وَ غَضِّ الْبَصَرِ وَلاَ تَجْعَلْ حَظّنَا مِنْهُالْجُوعَ وَالْعَطَشَ

Allāhumma bārik lanā fī Rajabin wa Shaʿbāna wa ballighnā shahra Ramaḍāna wa aʿinnā ʿalaṣ-ṣiyāmi wal-qiyāmi wa ḥifẓil-lisāni wa ghaḍḍil-baṣari wa lā tajʿal ḥaẓẓnā minhul-jūʿa wal-ʿaṭash

Oh Allah (swt), bless us in Rajab and Shaʿbān, so we reach the month of Ramaḍān. Help us in fasting, standing [in prayer], guarding our tongues, and lowering the gaze. And do not make our efforts [simply pangs of] hunger and thirst.[1]

In light of the Prophet's (ṣ) tradition (*ḥadīth)* and supplication (*duʿāʾ*), the spiritual wayfarer must understand the following:

- The months of Rajab and Shaʿbān are blessed for the believers who enter them, praying for repentance, guidance, forgiveness, and complete enlightenment.
- Entering into Ramaḍān in the best spiritual state should be the goal. To achieve this goal, one must adopt the Noble Prophet's (ṣ) custom of practicing self-control, praying, and fasting two months before the sacred month of Ramaḍān. Even fasting for one day in the months of Rajab and Shaʿbān helps the wayfarer achieve the desired outcome.
- The believers must always ask for Allah's help in worshiping Him, so their prayers and fasts transcend towards the lofty heights of Divine pleasure.
- The eyes and tongue are two organs that can lead a person into conflict. For instance, casting jealous eyes upon what others have may tempt a person to destroy another's blessing and grab it for himself. Likewise, an unbridled tongue will slander, backbite, and stir up conflict. Alternatively, if moral and spiritual restraints control these two organs, they will play an essential role in gaining closeness to Allah (swt).

In conclusion, the months of Rajab and Shaʿbān prepare the soul to embrace Allah's abundant mercy in Shahr Ramaḍān. Together, the three months make up the second triad of spiritual refinement. The first triad of spiritual development starts with the months of pilgrimage, Dhul Qaʿdah and Dhul Ḥijjah, so believers end and begin the year fully aware of the journey to Allah (swt). In the second triad, wayfarers confirm their commitment to the path of spiritual development through prayers, fasts, and self-restraint. Those who master the days of the sacred and revered months will come into full spiritual consciousness that the "months with Allah (swt) are twelve months." Henceforth, they are aware of and commit to their journey to Allah (swt) every day of the twelve months. This essentially, is a journey that begins with a few steps but lasts a lifetime - may we be given the firm determination to tread the path to Allah (swt), the Lofty!

1 Ibid.

RISE
Above the Clouds

By Syed Ali Jafri

One better appreciates sunlight after being in darkness, and a cold glass of water after being in the heat. We cherish our loved ones after being alone, and victory tastes sweeter after the bitterness of defeat. Similarly, when we remember the struggles of Allah's Prophets, we better appreciate the final victory of good over evil.

Appreciate the Struggle

Remember Prophet Nūḥ (ʿa) after 950 years of struggle, building an ark and being mocked. Remember Prophet Ibrāhīm (ʿa), catapulted into a blazing fire, as if he were a rock. Remember young Prophet Yūsuf (ʿa), left for dead by those who were his brothers. Remember Prophet Mūsā (ʿa), a baby floating away from his crying mother. Remember Prophet ʿĪsā (ʿa), raising the dead to bring attention to the One, and the pain he feels when they falsely state he is Allah's son. Remember Allah's beloved Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), breaking bread with the poor and oppressed; swollen feet from night prayers on a body that needed rest.

These men of Allah (swt) sacrificed all they had for our guidance and to remind us that no matter how low we have fallen, or how alone we feel, our loving Creator is near and ready to embrace us. With these struggles in mind, we smile and celebrate the 15th Day of the blessed month of Shaʿbān. On this day in the year 255 A.H. the world entered a new era: the era of the inheritor of the Prophetic message, the awaited guide, the guided, al-Mahdī (ʿaj). When Lady Narjis gave birth to the son of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (ʿa), she gave birth to more than just a pure baby or infallible Imām (ʿaj). She gave birth to Allah's final victory.

The birth of Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj) means the fulfillment of Allah's promise and the mission of the Prophets. It is the answer to the call of every oppressed one, from the time of Prophet Ādam (ʿa) until today, whether they know Allah (swt) by His name or any other way. For Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj) will break the idols which occupy our minds and hearts, like his grandfather, Prophet Ibrāhīm (ʿa). He will answer every silenced cry, whether a whimper or a scream. And in the end, Allah's deen shall reign supreme, a victory colossal. *"I shall surely prevail, I and My apostles."*[1]

Survive the Times

But we live in trying times, and an apparent paradox. On one hand, satanic forces advance and implement their agendas which impact the young and old, in the East and the West. The situation appears hopeless. On the other hand, around the globe people are ready for real change. They are ready to return to living how humans were meant to live and to accept a perfect leader with perfect solutions. They are ready for Islam, even if they do not know it. The situation is one full of hope. We reconcile this apparent paradox by recalling that similar circumstances existed just prior to the coming of the Noble Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ). Thus, we continue to struggle through difficult days, knowing that good times are near at hand.

This begs the question: How can we survive these difficult days without direct access to Allah's chosen leader? Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, better known as Shaykh Ṣadūq, in his masterpiece *Perfection of Faith and Completion of Divine Favor* (Kamāl ud-Dīn wa Tamām un-Niʿmah) relates a tradition in which one asked Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) how the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) could survive the trial of not having full access to their Imām (ʿaj) during the *Ghaybah*[2]? Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) responded that one who lives in that era should recite the following supplication:

اَللّٰهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِيْ نَفْسَكَ ، فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِيْ نَفْسَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ نَبِيَّكَ، اَللّٰهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِيْ نَبِيَّكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِيْ نَبِيَّكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ حُجَّتَكَ ، اَللّٰهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِيْ حُجَّتَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِيْ حُجَّتَكَ ضَلَلْتُ عَنْ دِيْنِيْ

"O Allah (swt), introduce Yourself to me, for if You do not introduce Yourself to me, I will not recognize Your Prophet (ṣ). O Allah (swt), introduce Your Messenger (ṣ) to me, for if You do not introduce Your Messenger (ṣ) to me, I will not recognize Your Proof (ʿaj). O Allah (swt), introduce Your Proof (ʿaj) to me, for if You do not introduce Your Proof (ʿaj) to me, I will deviate from my religion."[3]

Reciting this supplication has many spiritual benefits and rewards. In addition, as is the case with all the supplications of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa), it is filled with deep insight into how we can live successful lives. One lesson from this supplication is that to survive these times, we must increase our deep recognition (maʿrifah) of Allah (swt), the Noble Prophet (ṣ), and Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj).

1 Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Mujādilah (58), Verse 21

2 A period in which the people do not have full access to Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj) as part of Allah's plan.

3 Kamāl ud-Dīn wa Tamām un-Niʿmah, Vol. 2, P. 342

Benefit from the Sun

To deepen our recognition of Imām Mahdī (ʿaj), and better understand our relationship to him, we need to look no further than the tradition of "*the sun behind the clouds*." This tradition, also related by Shaykh Ṣadūq in *"Perfection of Faith and Completion of Divine Favor,"* is as follows: Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh al-Anṣārī asked the Noble Messenger (ṣ) to explain who were those "vested with authority" in the verse *"O you who have faith! Obey Allah (swt) and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you."*[4] In response, the Prophet (ṣ) introduced his successors, the 12 Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). The Prophet (ṣ) added that the 12th Imām (ʿaj) will be in a Ghaybah for a period. Jābir then asked if the followers of the 12th Imām (ʿaj) would benefit from him during that time. The Prophet (ṣ) replied:

قَالَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ إِي وَ اَلَّذِي بَعَثَنِي بِالنُّبُوَّةِ إِنَّهُمْ يَسْتَضِيئُونَ بِنُورِهِ وَ يَنْتَفِعُونَ بِوَلاَيَتِهِ فِي غَيْبَتِهِ كَانْتِفَاعِ اَلنَّاسِ بِالشَّمْسِ وَ إِنْ تَجَلَّلَهَا سَحَابٌ

"Yes, by the one who sent me with Prophethood, surely they will benefit from his light and from his guardianship during his Ghaybah (occultation) like the people derive benefit from the sun when it is hidden by the clouds…"[5]

Some great scholars, including the likes of ʿAllāmah Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and Āyatullāh ʿAbdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, highlighted a few points about the relationship between the sun and the clouds, and our relationship with the Imām (ʿaj) during the Ghaybah. Those points can be summarized as follows:

1) The sun behind the clouds has not gone anywhere. While the clouds are an obstacle between us and the sun, the sun is still present and where it should be. Similarly, our Imām (ʿaj) is present and active on earth.

2) The sun behind the clouds still benefits us. While we do not get direct access to sunlight on a cloudy day, we still benefit from its sunlight. Similarly, the Imām's presence benefits all of creation every moment of every day.

3) The sun is for all of creation. Similarly, the Imām (ʿaj) is the

4 Qurʾān, Sūrah an-Nisāʾ (4), Verse 59
5 Kamāl ud-Dīn wa Tamām un-Niʿmah, Vol. 1, P. 253

leader and guide of all of creation, not just his Shīʿahs. In fact, his mother being a new revert to Islam reminds us that what matters is where your journey ends, not where it began.

4) The sun behind the clouds is only relatively hidden. Clouds block our access to the sun when we are on the ground, but those same clouds are not an obstacle to one above the clouds (e.g. in an airplane). Similarly, while the *Ghaybah* is currently an obstacle between us and the Imām (ʿaj) at a collective level, as individuals we can elevate spiritually to a station "beyond the clouds" whereby we can gaze upon that shining sun.

5) Clouds pass. Similarly, this test will pass, and Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj) will return and fulfill his mission with Prophet ʿĪsā (ʿa) by his side. Will we be alongside them?

Conclusion

The signs of Allah (swt) and his proof, Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj), engulf us. In fact, if we reflect on our own lives and souls, we see them clearly. *"Soon we shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Truth..."*[6] As I write this I reflect on my own journey, from public school to law school to the seminary, from New York to Michigan to Texas to Qom, and I see the guiding hand of the Imām (ʿaj) leading me to where I am today. And if you reflect on your own journey, I am certain the same is true for you. And all praise is due to Allah (swt).

Dear believers, we live in the era of victories! But to spiritually partake in those victories, we must rise above the clouds and purify ourselves. This can only be done by living the sunnah and sīrah (traditions and way of life) of our beloved Messenger (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). Attach yourselves to the Qurʾān and this blessed family!

We ask Allah (swt) to bless Muḥammad (ṣ) and the family of Muḥammad (ʿa) and hasten the coming of the awaited one, Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj). And may the peace and blessings of Allah (swt) be upon you.

6 Qurʾān Sūrah Fuṣṣilat (41), Verse 53

concerns.

QUESTION:

When a person thinks about the past sins that they committed and the justice and accounting of Allah, they feel anxious and not at peace, what should they do?

BRIEF ANSWER

It is important to mention that according to the Qurʾān and ḥādīth, Allah dislikes feelings of hopelessness and fear. Ideally, a person should remain in a state between fear and hope equally where a person's fear motivates one to obey Allah, and one's hope in the mercy of Allah brings about encouragement and joy.

True followers of the right path are confident and at peace with themselves, because they know with certainty that every bad or unjust action that is done in this world, whether small or big, will be written in their book of deeds, and that they will be held accountable for those actions on the Day of Judgment. They are always careful of their actions, and make sure to perform that which Allah has made obligatory. They also avoid that which is forbidden and keep themselves away from sins. These individuals are able to gain mastery over their lower desires and carnal instincts through their belief. They are never doubtful about elevating themselves spiritually, nor are they doubtful about the justice of Allah.

The Noble Qurʾān says the following about the justice of Allah:

"And We shall set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be wronged in the least."[1]

To combat feelings of hopelessness and mental anguish, one should never doubt in the mercy of Allah. The aforementioned verse reminds us that Allah's justice will prevail on the Day of Judgment, and that we should not fear being wronged on that Day. At the same time, there are many verses in Qurʾān that remind us about Allah's mercy towards His servants.

It is worthy to mention that if Allah dealt with human beings strictly through His justice and examined every single action that was ever performed by a person throughout one's life, then no one could escape punishment (except the infallibles), and none would attain salvation. The Noble Qurʾān has said: *"And if it was not for the grace of Allah upon you and His mercy, none of you would have become pure, ever."*[2]

1 Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ (21), Verse 47.
2 Ibid., Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ (21), Verse 47.

" Tell Me About: Sins and Repentance" is a textual compilation of Islamic questions and answers that are commonly asked by university students and relate to many of the issues that we face in society today. They have been addressed by a prominent Islamic scholar to give a holistic and spiritual answer to their

DETAILED ANSWER

Imām as-Sajjād (ʿa) has extolled Allah's grace and justice through Supplication 10 which is entitled 'His Supplication in Seeking Asylum with Allah' in the following way:

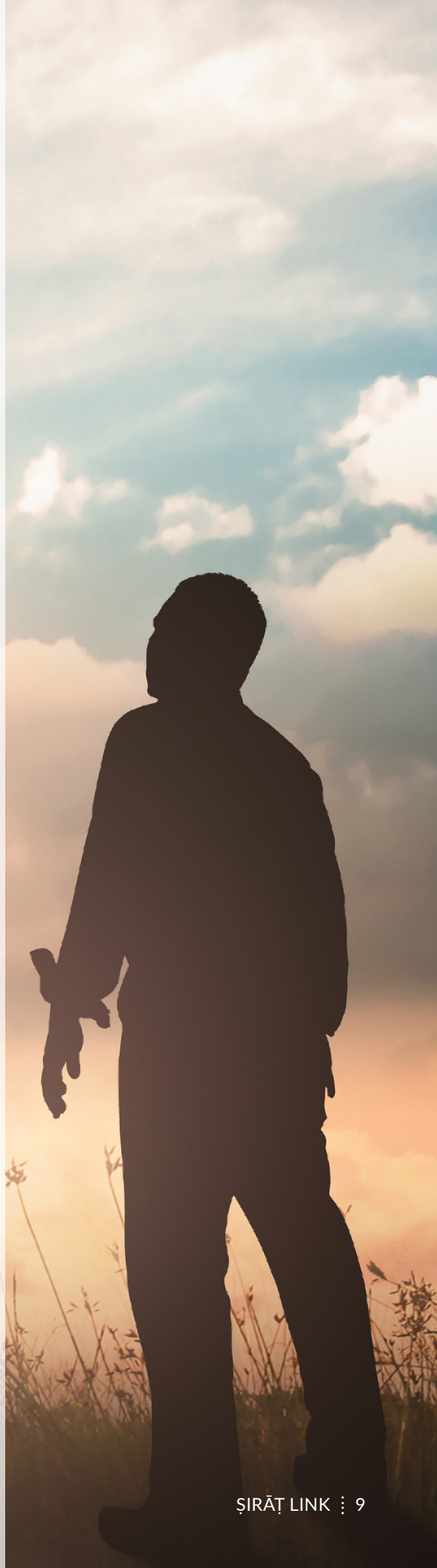
> *"O Allah, if You wish, You will pardon us through Your bounty, and if You wish, You will punish us through Your justice, So, make our path to Your pardon smooth through Your kindness, and grant us protection from Your punishment through Your forbearance, for none of us has the endurance for Your justice, and none of us can reach salvation without Your pardon!"*[1]

1 Ṣaḥīfah as-Sajjādiyah, Duʿā 10.

To reflect on the sins that have been committed is, in itself, a sign of Allah's grace and favor towards a sinner. Though a person who has sinned may experience mental anguish and loss of peace, that individual should thank Allah for bringing about those feelings. Repentance begins with feelings of regret and remorse; and true repentance will ultimately bring about Allah's forgiveness and peace of heart to the repentant. The Noble Prophet(ṣ) advised his companion Abā Dharr that: *"If Allah wants good for His servant, then He will cause that person's sins to materialize before them; and if He wants bad and misfortune for a servant, then He will cause that person to forget their sins."*[3] This ḥadīth makes it clear that remembering the sins which we have committed actually deters us from committing more sin.

To help alleviate feelings of anxiety and worry about one's status before Allah as a sinner, hold fast to the words of the Almighty Himself: *"Say [that Allah declares]: 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.'"*[4]

3 Biḥār al-Anwār, Vol. 74, The Prophet's (ṣ) Advice to Abā Dharr.
4 Qurʾān, Sūrah az-Zumar (39), Verse 53.



Past, Present, and Future

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) said:

"May Allah's mercy be upon one who has knowledge of where he came from, where he is now, and where he is going."

When one wants to grow closer to their Creator, there is a precursor to that closeness. Firstly, one should strive to understand what responsibilities one must accept in relation to their Creator's commandments. Beyond knowledge of those responsibilities is the implementation and perfection of them. To spiritually progress requires identifying what needs improvement in a person's life. Whether it is to consistently complete one's prayers and abide by the lawful and unlawful, for example, this spiritual building is never-ending and is meant to be a constant work in progress for every believer. That should not deter us from seeking growth, instead, it should inspire us to rise to the challenge. That being said, it is helpful to focus on a larger goal and identify a few weaknesses to work on at a time, instead of a large list that may feel overwhelming.

For your own safe keeping, write some personal reflections below based on the following prompts:

Where are you spiritually, today? Think about the actions that bring you closer to Allah and how you feel about those, as well as the negative ones that push you away from Allah.

Where would you like to go spiritually, tomorrow? Are there any practical things you can change right now that would assist you in moving toward that direction? What can you keep doing well?

List some personal goals you'd like to achieve:

The following are some of the instructions of scholars on moral and ethical traits for self-development. Three steps are needed to refine the soul after embracing Islam as taught by the Qurʿān and the tradition of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa): *mushāratah*, *murāqabah*, and *muḥāsabah*. We must have intellectual conviction and recognize that faith is not just mental acrobatics or believing deeply in one's heart, but rather it is demonstrated by our actions.

Tracker Tools

Mushāraṭah is to make a firm intention on a daily basis to stay away from all sin and do all our lawful duties. At the beginning of the day, we can address our *nafs* (inner self) directly, advising it to stay on the straight path throughout that day.

Setting a firm intention today for:

Muḥāsabah is to take account of oneself. At the end of the day it is important to review one's actions. If, God forbid, we made a mistake, we should ask for forgiveness. We may retrace our steps and try to look a little deeper to see what caused this slip and address that real core issue. If we see success and the favor of Allah in doing our responsibilities, we give credit where credit is due. We thank Allah for the success and praise Him. This helps us develop Islamic self-confidence where we realize Allah can do great things through us and our hands. His Grace is not limited. If we follow His commands, He will take our hands.

Murāqabah is one of the pillars of spiritual development. It is remaining vigilant throughout the day so that we avoid sin and ensure we perform our responsibilities. We see ourselves in the presence of Allah and try not to become heedless of that fact.

My actions requiring murāqabah:

my actions that require muḥāsabah:

Why Not Heaven?

By Leeda Delavarkhan

One day I was staring out my window and saw the most beautiful sunset I had ever seen - it radiated with hues of orange, pink, and purple, and the clouds looked like cotton candy. It was truly magical! The sun's glow illuminated the surfaces of the trees and houses, adding to the magic. This scene, painted by Allah (swt), brought peace and solace to my heart. I realized then that these moments in our lives are meant to remind us how fleeting this life really is. Like the sunset that fades into the earth, or the breeze that touches us passing by within seconds, or even the leaves that wither and fall from trees - every day we are somehow reminded of this - that this life is ephemeral. It is the world's way of reminding us that its very nature is finite; there is somewhere else that we must go.

Our existence here has the potential for an eternal life in Heaven. All the successes and failures in our lives will soon come to an end; the only thing that will last and decide our forever home is how we deal with the struggles we have in this life. And I believe our greatest desire is greater than anything we could obtain here, in this present life. Our truest and deepest desires, the longing we feel deep inside all of us, is a longing for an eternal Heaven, and not just because it is a place of extraordinary manifestations - that we might envision and hope for - but because we will be in absolute peace and bliss in the presence of Allah (swt). That is what I believe our souls truly desire – Allah (swt) Himself – the source of all goodness, love, and life, and the source of our peace, tranquility and hope. We seek to be in His omnipotent presence, pleased with us and us pleased with Him. And furthermore, to be with His near ones, those who have contributed to our guidance in this world. Part of the beauty and blessing of Paradise is that we have the potential of being with the *awliyā'* (close friends of Allah), the Prophets (ʿa), and the Imāms (ʿa), in Paradise. When we strive to attain Paradise, our souls also yearn to be near to those noble and perfect individuals who were our guides and models and whom we should all strive to be like in this very life. We ask Allah (swt) for this in our supplications.

قَالَ الشَّيْخُ الطُّوْسِيُّ فِي الْمِصْبَاحِ: «رُوِيَ عَنِ الأَئِمَّةِ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ، أَنَّ مَنْ صَلَّى الظُّهْرَ يَوْمَ الجُمُعَةِ وَصَلَّى بَعْدَهَا رَكْعَتَيْنِ يَقْرَأُ فِي الْأُوْلَى الْحَمْدُ وَ(قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ) سَبْعَ مَرَّات، وَفِي الثَّانِيَةِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ، وَبَعْدَ فَرَاغِهِ يَقُوْلُ: (أَللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي حَشْوُهَا الْبَرَكَةُ وَعُمَّارُهَا المَلَائِكَةُ، مَعَ نَبِيِّنَا مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَأَبِينَا إِبْرَاهِيْمَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام)، لَمْ تَضُرُّهُ بَلِيَّةٌ وَلَمْ تُصِبْهُ فِتْنَةٌ إِلَى الجُمُعَةِ الْأُخْرَى

Sheikh Aṭ-Ṭūsī said in (*Al-Miṣbāḥ*): "It was narrated from the Imāms (ʿa) that whoever prays the Ẓuhr prayer on Friday and prays two rakaʿāt after it, reciting in the first rakʿah Sūrah al-Fātiḥah and then Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ seven times. He recites the same in the second rakʿah and after finishing the prayer he says: *'Oh Allah make me among the people of the Paradise, that is filled with blessings and is inhabited by angels, (so I am) with our Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), and our father Ibrāhīm (ʿa).'* The one who performs this prayer won't be affected by any calamity or strife until the next Friday."[1]

As described in the Noble Qurʾān, Heaven is a magnificent realm of bliss and peace, of gardens and fruit trees, where the sun never sets, and the temperatures are neither hot or cold. We are told that we can have anything we ask for, and that we will come to know about things that we have never heard, seen, felt, touched, or ever smelled before. It will also be a place where we will also experience some of the good things we have had in this life. Allah (swt) will only add to the good things we know here because our Lord is *Al-Karīm*, the All-Generous One. We will be created as a new being in perfect form, radiating with magnificent light; we will never get old, sick, or die again.

Allah (swt) tells us in the Noble Qurʾān: *"And give good news to those who believe and do righteous deeds, that for them shall be gardens with streams running beneath them. Whenever they are provided with their fruit (for nourishment), they will say: 'This is what we were provided before,' and they were given something resembling it. There will be chaste spouses for them, and they will remain therein [forever]."* [2]

Heaven, now, is part of the unseen, we can at most guess at what it will be like, but our visions will always fall short. Even the most beautiful things in this world cannot compare to the things that we will experience in Heaven: not the sunset I saw that day, nor a colorful parrot, nor a neon fish, nor the coral reefs, not even a dandelion. Heaven will be filled with gardens as mentioned in the Noble Qurʾān, and pure companions and palaces will be created just for us. There will also be different grades and levels in Heaven - all given to us with perfect justice. The better we are in this life, the more elevated our status will be in Heaven - with rewards that are unique to us. Allah will consider the circumstances of our lives, the tests we have endured, and the different hardships we have faced and judge us accordingly. We might have undergone many difficulties in order to perform a virtuous deed, but that will not be unnoticed by the Almighty. He is a witness to how much we have learned and have grown in our consciousness, and have worked to purify our hearts, minds, and souls; everything will be perfectly accounted for by Him. Yet, Allah (swt) promises to reward us even beyond what we actually earn. This again is because Allah is All-Generous, All-Kind, and All-Gracious to everyone.

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) said, *"Allah, the All-Majestic, the All-Gracious, would not look to a friend of His who would strive and pressure his soul in obedience to his Imām and wish well for that individual but that he will be with us in the high position in Paradise."*[3]

It really makes me wonder, what besides Heaven is truly worth striving for? This overwhelming world is mixed with fortunes and misfortunes, comfort and discomfort, happiness and sadness. Even our best days fall short of absolute peace and comfort. It is not like Heaven. Heaven will be perfect and blissful, endless and eternal. And this is again because we have attained the pleasure of the source of all goodness: Allah (swt). So why not aim for something greater, why not strive for an eternal Heaven, dwelling in His Divine presence? Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) has said, *"Those who enter Paradise are in perpetual bliss."*[4]

1 Mafātīḥ al-Jinān, Section on Supplications and Recommended Actions for Friday (Jumuʿah)

2 Qurʾān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 25.

3 Al-Kāfī, Vol. 1, Ḥadīth #3

4 Ghurar al-Ḥikam, Ḥadīth #1338

This is Karbalā’’s month

By Nouri Sardar

This is Karbalā’’s month… Ḥusayn (ʿa) born on the third

Born on the fourth, the moon… the fifth day Imām as-Sajjād (ʿa)

This month, Karbalāʾ glows… in awe of its heroes

as-Sajjād (ʿa), Ḥusayn (ʿa) and his brother (ʿa)

Two suns and a moon make this month like no other

On this month’s third, we attain… the prince of Heavens, Ḥusayn (ʿa)… as he’s born

His birth shakes each tyrant’s reign… upon each tyrant’s domain… freedom drawn

A rise that none can explain… Ḥusayn’s (ʿa) name none can contain… this newborn

His love glows within the vein… and his love none can restrain… we’re reborn

Allah (swt) blesses this rising sun… as az-Zahrā (ʿa) adores her son

A dress of freedom, golden… he (ʿa) had worn

In fear, Karbalā’’s foes… In awe of its heroes

This month’s fourth would reveal… a moon, yet one so surreal… this, ʿAbbās (ʿa)

His body made of steel… by the father of zeal… none could pass

In service he would kneel… with his eye on his heel… none surpass

Teaching, Ḥusayn’s (ʿa) his seal… and Ḥusayn’s greatness he’ll… teach his class

Only with his brother’s birth… was known this ʿAbbās’ (ʿa) worth

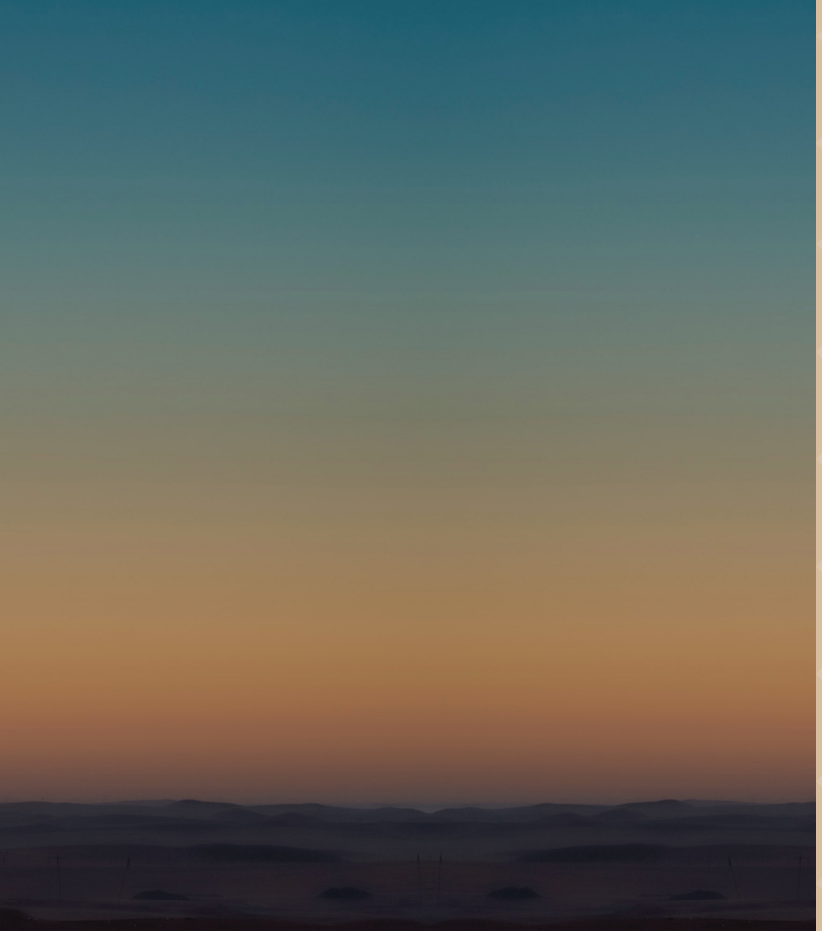
To him this is Ḥusayn’s (ʿa) Earth… lakes and grass

In love, Karbalāʾ grows… In awe of its heroes

Only few board Ḥusayn’s (ʿa) ship… fewer know as-Sajjād’s (ʿa) worship… to his Lord

His tongue with Allah (swt), he’d equip… words that rested on each lip… souls would board

From worship’s beauty he’d sip… on divine beads, hold his grip… his soul soared



On this day, beats of hearts skip… as the balance of kingship… is restored

Prayer's a crown of gold we wear… but as-Sajjād (ʿa) beautifies prayer

A status no-one, nowhere… can afford

Karbalāʾ tears its woes… in awe of its heroes

Karbalāʾ, rise up in your pride… two suns and a moon reside… in your land

Mortality they defied… with the battle-cries they cried… proud you stand

Your beauties, tonight, don't hide… these three, none can, if they tried… understand

Tonight hearts to you are tied… their tears of joy they have dried… with your sand

Every soul is left in awe… from the eye tears of joy pour

Millions of hearts implore… from your hand

Dreams to Karbalāʾ flow… In awe of its heroes

Excerpt from

Munājāt ash-Shaʿbāniyyah
(Whispered prayer of Shaʿbān)

by Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) found in Mafātiḥ al-Jinān

إِلٰهِي ٱنْظُرْ إِلَيَّ نَظَرَ مَنْ نَادَيْتَهُ فَأَجَابَك

Ilāhin-ẓur ilayya naẓara man nādaytahū faʾajābak

O my God, (please) look at me in the same way as You look at one whom You called so he responded to You

وَٱسْتَعْمَلْتَهُ بِمَعُوْنَتِكَ فَأَطَاعَك

Was-taʿmaltahu bimaʿūnatika faʾaṭṭāʿak

and whom You conferred with Your aid so he obeyed You.

يَا قَرِيْبًا لَا يَبْعُدُ عَنِ لْمُغْتَرِّ بِه

Yā qarīban lā yabʿudu ʿanil-mughtarri bih

O He Who is too close to depart from one who is heedless to Him!

وَيَا جَوَادًا لَا يَبْخَلُ عَمَّنْ رَجَا ثَوَابَه

Wa yā jawādan lā yabkhalu ʿamman rajā thawābah

O He Who is too magnanimous to deprive one who hopes for His reward!

إِلٰهِي هَبْ لِيْ قَلْبًا يُدْنِيْهِ مِنْكَ شَوْقُه

Ilāhī hab lī qalban yudnīhi minka shawquh

O my God, (please) grant me a heart whose longing (for You) will draw it closer to You,

وَلِسَانًا يُرْفَعُ إِلَيْكَ صِدْقُه

Wa lisānan yurfaʿu ilayka ṣidquh

And a tongue whose truthfulness is raised up to You (when the angels register our actions),

وَنَظَرًا يُقَرِّبُهُ مِنْكَ حَقُّه

Wa naẓaran yuqarribuhu minka ḥaqquh

and a sight whose righteousness advances it towards You.

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“Say [that Allah declares,] ‘**O My servants** who have committed excesses against their own souls, **do not despair of the mercy of Allah**. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins. Indeed, He is the **All-Forgiving**, the **All-Merciful**.”

Noble Qurʾān, Sūrah az-Zumar (39), Verse 53

Transliteration Guide

Arabic terms in this magazine have been transliterated according to the following guidelines:

ء	a, i, or u (initial form)	ظ	ẓ
ء	ʾ (medial or final form)	ع	ʿ
ا	a	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
ت	t	ق	q
ث	th	ك	k
ج	j	ل	l
ح	ḥ	م	m
خ	j	ن	n
د	d	ه	h
ذ	dh	و	w
ر	r	ي	y
ز	z	ة	h (without iḍāfah)
س	s	ة	t (with iḍāfah)
ش	sh		
ص	ṣ	ـَـ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِـ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُـ	u

Glossary

Jannah: Paradise

Ḥadīth: Tradition

Duʿāʾ: Supplication

Awliyāʾ: Close friends of Allah

Next Issue

The Golden Chain

Spring Cleaning

Four Features